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SUBJECT: PAS LAGOS CELEBRATES EARTH DAY 2003

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¶11. SUMMARY: On April 24, PAS Lagos organized a lecture and panel discussion at our auditorium to mark the 2003 Earth Day celebration. Two panelists delivered addresses on the occasion, the PAO and CAO each introduced short films on the environment, and the IRC distributed colorful Infopacks to provide guests with additional material to stimulate deeper reflection and discussion. Earth Day posters, the 10-year anniversary series as well as the 2003 set, adorned the lobby and the auditorium. We awarded Earth Day posters to our first 15 guests. END SUMMARY.

¶12. Approximately 70 guests attended the PAS Lagos Earth Day event. With help from the Educational Advising Center (EAC) staff, we were able to reach a younger audience. Ten students, both high school and undergraduates, were in attendance. A large delegation from the Lagos State Government attended, including the Director of Environmental Services and a 1997-98 Hubert H. Humphrey fellow. EXXON/Mobil's Director of External Affairs, academics and journalists also participated in the program. The bulk of the audience came from the NGO sector.

¶13. PAS invited Melissa Cline, the ECONOFF who holds post's environment portfolio, to be one of the featured panelists. Recently returned International Visitor Folashade Jaji was the second panelist and in part shared what she had experienced during the "Sustainable Economic Development and Environmental Protection" program, which took place in January 2003. Jaji currently leads the Lagos State Ministry for Women's Affairs and Poverty Alleviation. Given her portfolio and recent IV experience, Jaji has briefed the State Ministry for Environment on key issues.

¶14. Cline spoke on land use and regulation, at times comparing critical issues in Lagos to those in her hometown, Washington, DC. She presented a clear five-point plan to help NGOs, planners and other stakeholders best achieve their goals for sustainable and successful development. Cline emphasized that all stakeholders (i.e., government, NGOs, businesses and academics) must develop a common agenda in order to achieve a measure of success.

¶15. Jaji spoke about the spirit of volunteerism that she witnessed in the U.S. and how it that spirit has empowered American society, especially in the areas of sustainable development and environmental awareness. Jaji then re-capped her recommendations to Lagos State on how to encourage safe growth in such a rapidly expanding urban area. "Smart Growth", she remarked, did not necessarily mean "no growth." In one potentially controversial comment, Jaji also urged the Nigerian government to remain open to genetically modified foods, insisting that they are not detrimental to one's health. Her brief explanation of Lagos State's Waste-To-Wealth program helped demonstrate how byproducts of construction need not be dangerous to the environment.

¶16. A very lively discussion took place after the panelists' presentations. One guest raised the challenges of raising the environmental consciousness of the poor when they are confronting basic survival issues such as clothing, feeding and housing their families. Many participants urged the USG to "pressure" the Nigerian government to respect internationally recognized best practices in environmental management. Ms. Cline opined that Nigerian NGOs were much better placed to undertake a sustained environmental advocacy campaign.

¶17. BACKGROUND: Nigeria has ten cities with over 1 million inhabitants and as such, the nation's urban environmental challenges are unique in sub-Saharan African. Nigeria's urban population now equals its rural population; this is an entirely different reality from just a few years ago. Lagos is not the only city in Nigeria with severe waste and urban sprawl problems, but with a population approaching 15 million, it unquestionably represents the most acute. PAS

deliberately asked panelists to focus on urban issues, and Lagos turned out to be an ideal city in which to hold the event.

18. COMMENT: It was interesting to note how many participants, from panelist Jaji to a high school student to an NGO representative, seemed to glorify "the good old days" of environmental awareness under the former military regimes which ruled Nigeria until 1999. Many of them reminisced about the time when Saturdays were dedicated to home clean-ups and Thursdays dedicated to market clean-ups. Audience members seemed to appreciate the discipline that the past military regimes required from the population on cleanliness and orderliness and counted these two attributes as losses under the current dispensation.

19. PAS launched this event as a "celebration" of Earth Day and was not certain how it would turn out. However, PAS was pleased that despite the Easter holiday, election season and rains that morning, turnout was encouraging, and even more reassuring, participants were extremely interested in talking about these issues. The program ran a half-hour over the programmed time because several participants insisted on making their points. Many guests requested copies of the speeches delivered, and others extolled the importance of networking, all guests' contact information be circulated. In response to this, the IO circulated copies of Cline's speech as a press release as well as making it available the next day on the Embassy's website. The CAO also started an email list of all attendees and encouraged them to work together.

10. While our Earth Day celebration was a success and PAS will certainly plan events for future years, it might be helpful if more resources are made available for Posts. While the announcement cable on Earth Day was comprehensive, the websites were not greatly helpful, and PAS had to scramble to find any audio-visual material that was appropriate, in the end using a clip from a 1995 VOA-produced film to at least explain the origins of the day.

11. CONCLUSION: Top officers from the Lagos State Government made commitments to do more to ensure a more environmentally -friendly Lagos. Participants thanked Post for bringing the environmental issues raised to the their attention and for providing a forum for them to learn from the U.S. experience and form a network to protect the Nigerian environment. NGOs shared valuable information. Participants agreed to work towards a healthy and sustainable environment in Nigeria and mentioned planning to have a follow-up program.

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